

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN ARTISTS SERIES NO. 21

# EUGEN WEISZ

Memorial Exhibition



No. 8

Self-Portrait

October 30 - November 28, 1954

THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, D. C.

## FOREWORD

Eugen Weisz has contributed greatly to the artistic life of this city. In spite of the modesty of their author, the appeal of his works spread to an ever widening circle of admirers. As a teacher at The Corcoran School of Art for over thirty years he was in a position to communicate his ideals and impart his craftsmanship to countless students. His warm and sincere personality, moreover, had won him a large group of friends.

The Corcoran Gallery of Art is privileged in being able to hold this retrospective exhibition. It extends its appreciation and thanks to those who made it possible: Mrs. Eugen Weisz, who devoted a great deal of her time over a period of months to its preparation, and who wrote the biographical essay; the collectors who generously lent their works by the artist; Richard Lahey, Principal of The Corcoran School of Art, who helped in the selection; Mrs. David Claire for curatorial assistance during the organization of the exhibition; and Miss Agnes Mayo for locating some of the works.

HERMANN WARNER WILLIAMS, JR.  
*Director*

## EUGEN WEISZ

IT IS NOT a matter of chance that this Memorial Exhibition of the work of Eugen Weisz should take place at The Corcoran Gallery of Art. Here he had his first one-man show in 1934. His name has been linked with The Corcoran School of Art for over thirty years, first as a student, then as Instructor, and, since 1935, as Vice-Principal. This association with the School and the Gallery, which he kept to the end of his life, meant a great deal to him. It provided a stimulating environment for this man who, for so long, nurtured the dream of "becoming a good painter". He brought to his work as artist, teacher, and lecturer a unique combination of exceptional intelligence, unusual talents, deep feeling and a rich experience of life. These qualities of mind and heart were felt in his daily relation with people and left their imprint on his canvasses. The impact of his personality extended beyond Washington through the work of his pupils, his lectures and his achievement as a painter.

The approximately 80 works assembled for this exhibition start with the early nineteen twenties and show every phase of his development as an artist throughout his career. Naturally, only a small part of his total production is included. As he worked in a wide variety of media, oil, watercolor, pastel, pen and ink, lithographic crayon and pencil, examples of all are shown, as well as his single piece of sculpture. Some of these works are in the permanent collection of The Corcoran Gallery of Art, while others are lent by private collectors. Many have been exhibited before in one-man shows or group shows in Washington, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and other cities. Some, however, have never been shown publicly before.

Eugen Weisz was very modest about showing his work. His standards were so high that he was never satisfied with his pictures. When they came back from exhibitions, he would often return to them, study them intently, and sometimes repaint them in a totally new manner.

What did he paint? He painted everything that came within the range of his vision. Here, on canvas and paper, is

the record of his life, and of the life about him: his portraits, scenes of industrial Georgetown and the Washington waterfront where he conducted his outdoor summer classes, landscapes of Maine and Canada where he spent summers, the stretch of country around his home in Virginia, still-lifes, and the views of the interior of his studio. Those who heard him speak of the influence of subject matter on the aims and achievements of the painter will recall how he came back again and again to the conclusion that the quality of the feeling and of the mind that the artist brought to bear in the creation of a piece of work, and not subject matter, was the only thing that counted.

His portraits are character studies. He was too intent on interpreting the essence of personality beneath the outward appearance of the sitter to paint fashionable portraits. With the same uncompromising integrity that characterizes all his work, he depicted not only the sitter who was before him but the person he felt he or she might become. Reluctantly he put finishing touches on portraits which he felt he had not completed, although he had often worked on them over an extended period of time. And while he surrendered them to their owners, he always hoped to get at them again, to realize his vision completely.

He did several portraits of himself over the years. The depth and range of the expressive quality that he attained in painting is best seen in these self-portraits. The earliest shown in this exhibition is his *Self-Portrait* painted in 1923. Of his 1935 *Self-Portrait*, which was acquired by The Corcoran Gallery of Art, he humorously wrote C. Powell Minnigerode, then Director of the Gallery:

"In the future, every time I will make the rounds of the Gallery according to my habit to see my old friends there, the pictures I like so well—I'll be confronted by this somewhat stern, searching and uncomely mug which happens to be my own.

"However, considering that I need to feel responsible only for the painting and not for the unfortunate countenance which served as its model, I can still feel unqualified satisfaction with the decision of the Committee."

Next in sequence are the crayon *Self-Portrait* of 1944, detached and thoughtful, and the caricature in lithographic crayon, entitled *Meet the Artist*, where he depicted himself with such grotesque humor that one of Washington's art critics commented: "Some played it straight; others, notably Eugen Weisz, went in for caricature. What this wise and able painter does to himself is something terrible." In his last self-portraits there is true pathos, especially in the oil sketch which served as a study for his last self-portrait, the haunting *Portrait of the Artist* of 1953.

As he was intent on capturing the essence of personality in his portraits, so he was equally engrossed in interpreting landscapes. He would invariably remark "the scenery is very paintable" wherever he went, but he would only paint a landscape after he had become thoroughly imbued with it. The main reason for returning to Canada and New England in the summer, he would say, was to become once more familiar with effects seen when painting there before. He had a predilection for landscapes of cedars against the sky, maybe because they made such a distinct pattern of light and dark, maybe because they reminded him of the landscape in Italy where he had spent his childhood. He never tired of painting the country around Bailey's Crossroads, Virginia, to which he moved after his marriage in 1933, and where he built with his own hands a stone home near a cedar grove. In canvas after canvas, he depicted the appearance of cedars and the passage of the seasons in all their moods, as in *Cedars and Broomsedge* (1948), a brooding landscape of ominous cedars against burnished fields and leaden sky. He interpreted landscape with freedom and great simplicity, reducing it to its bare essentials, painting broadly with a full brush. His water-color landscapes possess a marked three-dimensional quality and are as rich in tone as oil paintings.

His growth as a colorist can perhaps best be measured by his still-lifes. He watched oak leaves turning red and brown and painted their last glow before they fell on the ground in *Still Life with Oak Leaves* (1941), *Winter Bouquet* (1945) and *Jug and Oak Leaves* (1951). From the *Still Life* (1932), painted for the Corcoran Biennial Exhibition, he moved on to the *Still Life with Squash* (1942), and to *Easy Chair* (1948), painted in a somber, beautifully adjusted low key. Although he abandoned

this low key in his last two still-lifes painted in 1951, *On the Studio Table* and *Studio Interior*, for colors high in key which suffused his pictures with an intense light, the same sensitive adjustment of color is there to give them their quality.

His fine draftsmanship is particularly evident in his lithographic drawings which he treated very broadly, working with flat, angular strokes reminiscent of Cubism, as in *Church at Annandale* (1938), or with almost Oriental delicacy as in *Iris*, done the same year.

Eugen Weisz painted in a style all his own. It has a personal quality because it was the result of his own thought, his own searching. His keenness of observation, his clarity of purpose, his breadth of conception are stamped on his works. To him, the most important aspect of painting was the idea. "But the idea is not a literary idea—not an illustration. The color is the idea". He organized his pictures around a simple big plan of light and dark, made up of the most significant shapes, weaving in subtle variations of colors and forms within those areas without weakening the big plan. His abstraction of pattern and volume and his use of color are in the modern idiom. However, he did not give in to the tide of experimental modernism and transient theories of the times; it swept all around him but not over him. He knew his strength as an artist and went his own way.

He analyzed the works of art of the past and of today in the perspective of history in order to identify what qualities gave them temporary or lasting worth. He was convinced that the various styles of art were in themselves inconsequential and that everything of genuine worth was timeless.

"There are a thousand ways to make a great work of art," he would say, "the academic painter, the romanticist, the impressionist, the modernist, none of them have the key in their pocket . . . the way in which it was made has nothing to do with it . . . and when it has any quality, it isn't because of any theories of the time, but because some individual thought clearly, thought beautifully, and sensitively."

This was the great goal towards which he was always striving in his own work.

It must have been this insistence on lasting values that made Eugen Weisz such an unforgettable teacher. He instilled in his students something of his own keenness of observation and breadth of mind, imparting basic principles of color, form, meaning, which they could use as their own. His students say that he taught them painting "but also seeing, thinking and feeling". "What I learned from you," one of them wrote, "seems to relate to everything in life; the relationship of things to each other; it all works the same way." He was an inspiring teacher. His students worked for him with a dedicated intensity because he never was satisfied with anything but their best. They respected and admired him as an artist and a scholar, and they loved him as a teacher because he understood their dreams so well. For it was the man, as much as the artist, who made such a deep impression on his students, as indeed was the case with all who came in contact with him.

Eugen Weisz was a warm, simple man, quiet and reserved, yet he had a hard and adventurous life, especially in his early years. He was born on January 3, 1890, in Nagy-Surany, a small village in the northern hills of Hungary, of an Hungarian father and an Italian mother. Orphaned at an early age, he was left to fend for himself. His interest in art may be traced to his childhood; for by the age of eleven, he had walked across the Alps to begin his apprenticeship with a well-known Italian artist in Rome. There he scraped palettes, did odd jobs around the studio, at the same time learning to draw. Restlessness drove him on. He put to sea as a cabin boy on Mediterranean fishing boats. Later, he signed on as a sailor on ships that plied between Odessa, Bremen and Newcastle. Because of his familiarity with languages which he had acquired during his wanderings, he was hired as interpreter for Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show which was touring Europe in 1906. At the close of the tour, Buffalo Bill brought him to this country. He was sixteen when he landed in New York.

Then came another succession of jobs. He was in turn cook, prize fighter, railroad construction gang worker and sign painter in order to earn a living as he traveled the length and breadth of the United States, always drawing and sketching wherever he went. He joined General Pershing's troops when

trouble broke out on the Mexican border. At the entrance of the United States into World War I, he re-enlisted as a private, was commissioned, and rose to the rank of Captain of Infantry. It was after he was discharged from the General Staff in Washington, where he had been stationed just prior to demobilization, that he decided to devote all his time to art. He then enrolled in The Corcoran School of Art where he received its highest award, the Gold Medal, in 1921. Later, he studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelph'a, and at the Albright School of Fine Arts in Buffalo. Upon returning to The Corcoran, he was invited to join the faculty in 1924 where he continued until his death.

Aside from his training in art, he had no formal education. He read extensively, and studied the best that there was to see in the galleries of this country as well as in those of Europe, to which he returned for painting trips in the summers of 1925 and 1927. For many years, he modestly insisted that he did not think of himself as a painter, but as a student who was still learning.

While continuing to teach at The Corcoran, he was also on the faculty of the Department of Fine Arts of The George Washington University as Art Critic and Lecturer and lectured on the history of art at Trinity College as well. His annual series of public lectures at The Corcoran and to various groups in Washington and other cities were always extremely popular. Due to his stimulating manner of presentation and the way he probed into the qualities of works of art, he became almost as well known as a lecturer as he was as a painter. His marriage to Renée Fantin, who came of a family of musicians, proved very congenial, and from then on he devoted more and more time to painting. His works won many awards, including three Bronze Medals of the Washington Society of Art'sts in 1927, 1944, and in 1950; the Landscape Medal of the Washington Society of Artists and an Honorable Mention from the Washington Water Color Club in 1944. He was a member of these professional societies as well as of the Artists Guild of Washington.

Eugen Weisz went to Arizona for his health last fall on a year's leave of absence. He died in Tucson on January 3rd of this year, on his sixty-fourth birthday. He was buried with mili-

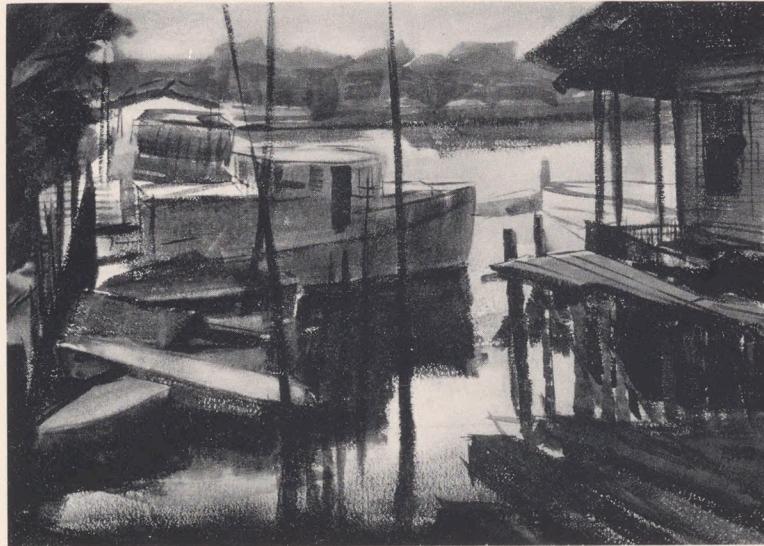
tary honors in Arlington Cemetery. Editorials in the Washington newspapers paid tribute to his career as an artist and teacher and to the man who had influenced and inspired so many who lived in the world of art. Another homage came from over one hundred and fifty prominent artists throughout the country, many of whom are his former students, who contributed some of their best works for an auction sale towards the establishment of The Eugen Weisz Memorial Scholarship in The Corcoran School of Art. This is just the sort of memorial of which the artist would have been most proud.

First and foremost, Eugen Weisz was a painter, and the works brought together for this exhibition will have to speak for themselves. They will bear out how active he was as an artist, particularly in the last years of his life, constantly searching and experimenting with color and form in order to perfect his own expression in art.

RENÉE FANTIN WEISZ

## Lenders to the Exhibition

MR. AND MRS. G. N. DE ARAUJO	DR. AND MRS. LOUIS NEYMAN
MR. AND MRS. JAMES D. BRECKENRIDGE	ROBERT L. PARSONS
MRS. REBECCA HELEN COWAN	COL. AND MRS. ROBERT S. PICKENS
NORRIS CRANDALL	MRS. EDWIN T. RICE
MR. AND MRS. MAX A. EGLOFF	S. THOMAS SALTZ
MRS. EILLEEN GARDNER GALER	THE HON. FRANCIS B. SAYRE
DR. PHILIP P. GOLAND	PAUL M. SEGAL
MRS. ERIK G. HAKANSSON	MRS. DARRELL SICKMAN
MRS. GORDON L. HAWK	DR. JENNY STEINER
HUBERT MARGOLIES	MR. AND MRS. KENNETH STUBBS
JOHN RUSSELL MASON	MR. AND MRS. FRED C. WANDEL
MISS AGNES MAYO	MR. AND MRS. CLARK WARBURTON
MRS. SARAH McCCLURE McDANIEL	MRS. EUGEN WEISZ
MR. AND MRS. ZEUXIS F. NEVES	DR. AND MRS. PAUL W. WILSON



No. 58

The Waterfront

# CATALOGUE

## Oils

1. Self-Portrait 1923
2. Portrait of Miss Maria Louise Orendorf c. 1925
3. Portrait of Hockey Players 1926
4. Boy 1927
5. The Minstrels 1928  
*Lent by Mrs. Eileen Gardner Galer*
6. Landscape c. 1928  
*Lent by Norris Crandall*
7. Still Life 1932
8. Self-Portrait 1935  
*Collection of The Corcoran Gallery of Art*
9. Portrait of Mrs. Wm. H. Parsons 1937  
*Lent by Robert L. Parsons*
10. Portrait of The Hon. Francis Bowes Sayre 1938  
*Lent by The Hon. Francis B. Sayre*
11. Near Bangor, Maine 1940
12. Old House, Maine 1940
13. Chrysanthemums c. 1940
14. Still Life with Oak Leaves 1941
15. Still Life with Squash 1942
16. Portrait of Mary Page Browning 1942  
*Lent by Mrs. Gordon L. Hawk*
17. Portrait of "Our Helen" c. 1942
18. Portrait Sketch of Jessalee c. 1944  
*Lent by Mrs. Darrell Sickman*
19. Winter Bouquet 1945
20. Easy Chair 1948  
*Lent by Paul M. Segal*



No. 31

On the Studio Table

21.	Cedars and Broomsedge	1948
22.	Fall <i>Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Clark Warburton</i>	c. 1948
23.	Autumn <i>Lent by Mr. and Mrs. G. N. de Araujo</i>	c. 1948
24.	Edge of Georgetown	1950
25.	Rock Creek at Georgetown	1950
26.	Snow in the Suburbs	c. 1950
27.	Cedars in Spring <i>Lent by Dr. Jenny Steiner</i>	c. 1950
28.	Dawn <i>Lent by Hubert Margolies</i>	1951
29.	Georgetown in Sunlight <i>Lent by Mrs. Rebecca Helen Cowan</i>	1951

30.	The Hunter <i>Lent by Dr. Philip P. Goland</i>	1951
31.	On the Studio Table	1951
32.	Interior	1951
33.	Virginia Winter <i>Lent by S. Thomas Saltz</i>	c. 1951
34.	Jug and Oak Leaves	1952
35.	Studio Interior	1952
36.	Portrait of Kenneth Stubbs <i>Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Stubbs</i>	1952
37.	Portrait of S. Thomas Saltz <i>Lent by S. Thomas Saltz</i>	1943-1953
38.	Portrait of a Lady <i>Lent by Mrs. Edwin T. Rice</i>	1947-1953
39.	Study for Portrait of the Artist	1953
40.	Portrait of the Artist	1953

## Watercolors

41.	Still Life with Apples	1934
42.	Tulips <i>Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Fred C. Wandel</i>	1934
43.	Industrial Washington <i>Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Max A. Egloff</i>	1937
44.	Red Barrels at Tadoussac	1937
45.	Brickyard	1938
46.	Early Snow	1944
47.	Houses on the Hill (gouache) <i>Lent by Mr. and Mrs. James D. Breckenridge</i>	1946
48.	In the Laurentian Mountains <i>Lent by John Russell Mason</i>	1946
49.	Apple Orchard	1947



No. 69

The Oak

50. Industrial Georgetown	1947
51. Sunlight in Georgetown	1948
52. The Clouds	c. 1949
53. Cement Works	c. 1949
54. Across the Hill	c. 1949
55. Off Washington Circle	c. 1951
56. Flower Sketch	c. 1951
57. House Boats	c. 1951
58. The Water Front	1952

*Collection of The Corcoran Gallery of Art*

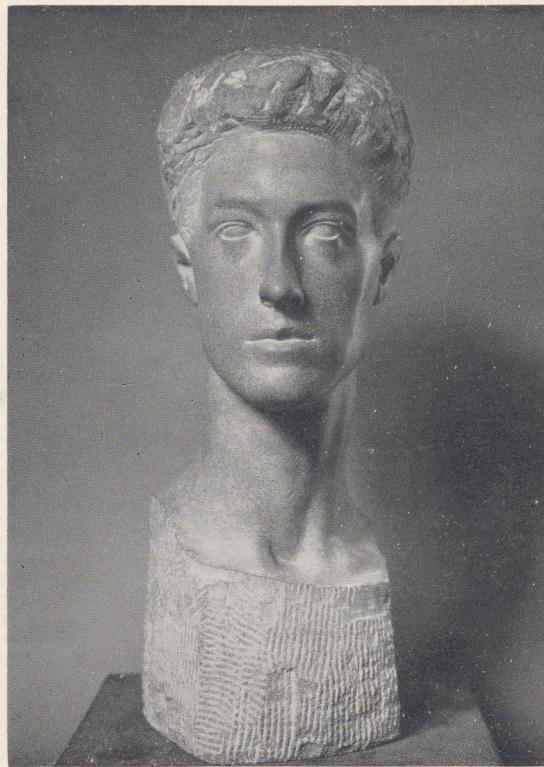
59. Loudoun Barn (casein) 1952  
*Lent by Col. and Mrs. Robert S. Pickens*

### **Pastels**

60. Abandoned Trucks c. 1925  
61. Portrait Sketch of Renée 1938  
62. Zinnias 1942  
63. Portrait Sketch of Allen 1945  
64. Sunset in the Cedars c. 1950

### **Drawings**

65. Card Player (pencil) c. 1925  
66. Card Player (pencil) c. 1925  
67. Old Church (lithographic crayon) c. 1925  
68. Portrait of Sarah McClure (charcoal) c. 1933  
*Lent by Mrs. Sarah McClure McDaniel*  
69. The Oak (lithographic crayon) 1938  
*Collection of The Corcoran Gallery of Art*  
70. Iris (lithographic crayon) 1938  
*Lent by Dr. and Mrs. Louis Neyman*  
71. Church at Annandale (lithographic crayon) 1938  
72. Cedars and Sunlight (India ink) 1938  
*Lent by Mrs. Erik G. Hakansson*  
73. Self-Portrait (Conte) 1944  
*Lent by Dr. and Mrs. Paul W. Wilson*  
74. Portrait Drawing (charcoal) 1945  
75. Portrait for "Meet the Artist" 1947  
(lithographic crayon)  
*Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Zeuxis F. Neves*  
76. Noel, 1949 (Conte) 1949



No. 83

Limestone Head

77. Churchyard, West River (Conte)	1950
<i>Lent by Miss Agnes Mayo</i>	
78. Nude (sepia)	c. 1950
79. Nude (Conte)	c. 1951
80. The Ledge (Conte)	c. 1951
81. Trees (ink and wash)	c. 1951
82. The Swedish Bowl (pencil)	1952

## **Sculpture**

83. Limestone Head	c. 1950
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